

**WESTERN GOVERNORS**  
**State of the State Addresses**February 2, 2024  
Special Report #2594**Alaska**

On January 30, Governor Mike Dunleavy (R-AK) delivered his sixth State of the State address. He focused his remarks on public safety, education reform, and affordability of energy and housing. He highlighted forthcoming legislation and infrastructure projects to reduce the cost of electricity and natural gas. He also emphasized the need to improve food security by enabling wild harvest and bolstering agricultural production. He said: “Whether it’s coal, natural gas, advanced nuclear, or our abundant renewable resources, we must pursue every energy opportunity to secure affordable and sustainable supplies for Alaska.”

He continued: “At the same time, our oil, natural gas, and minerals of all kinds will remain in high demand around the world for decades to come, and we’ll continue to demonstrate that nobody can develop those resources better than Alaska. There’s no doubt we’ve done well developing some of our natural resources, but like our forests, we can do better developing our vast lands and waters to feed Alaskans... Alaska is blessed with abundant and clean lands and waters, and we can develop these resources to become food independent once again.” [https://gov.alaska.gov/wp-content/uploads/Dunleavy-State-of-the-State\\_2024.pdf](https://gov.alaska.gov/wp-content/uploads/Dunleavy-State-of-the-State_2024.pdf)

**Arizona**

On January 9, Governor Katie Hobbs (D-AZ) delivered her second State of the State address on border security, jobs and housing, education, and ensuring a secure water future. In her remarks on water security, she announced the Alternative Designation of Water Resources (ADAWS) program. ADAWS will provide an alternative route for developers to receive an Assured Water Supply (AWS) determination by committing new alternative supplies that meet AWS requirements. She said: “Of course, to discuss Arizona’s future, we must also talk about water – how to protect what we have today, how to navigate the challenges ahead, and how to maximize opportunities when mother nature offers them. Thanks to the careful planning and bipartisanship of generations of leaders before us, Arizona is at the forefront of water conservation and innovation. Our state uses less water today than in the mid-1950s, even as our population has boomed. However, just because we have been successful in the past does not mean we can relax about the future. We can reject the doomsayers, but we must always have open and honest conversations about our water resources – not shy away because they can be difficult.”

She continued: “As the first year of my administration has shown, I will take decisive action to protect Arizona’s water future. Before this chamber last year, I highlighted a corporation pumping groundwater in La Paz County with essentially no oversight. After I sent investigators and found they were in violation of their lease, I ended it. And as of next month, all Butler Valley leases held by this entity will be terminated – protecting water for nearby communities. I will continue working with everybody – farmers and agricultural interests, urban and rural communities, local and regional entities – to find the solutions we need to ensure our water future is secure for tomorrow and for generations. There is no better example of this than the agreement I negotiated earlier this year with our neighbors, Nevada and California, to conserve at least three million acre-feet of water – enough for nine million homes – by 2026. With this historic agreement, we stood up to the federal government’s egregious plan to slash Arizona’s water and we safeguarded our natural resources. But this is only a starting point. We have not put the decades-long drought in our rearview mirror yet. We must always strive to do more through expanding public-private partnerships, increasing conservation, exploring new technology, and maintaining a steadfast commitment to strengthening protections where needed.”

She said: “The bipartisan Water Policy Council I created last year – comprised of water leaders from across the state with a wide range of experience – has embodied this spirit with a series of commonsense recommendations to secure our water future. For decades, rural Arizonans who have begged, demanded, and fought to protect their groundwater have been ignored. Now, after forty years of waiting, it’s time we finally take action and update our groundwater management laws. That’s why we must have the courage to take action where others haven’t and empower rural Arizonans to have a say in how their water is used. And for too long, we have allowed development that skirted our smart and commonsense consumer protections for water availability. We must close the loopholes that allow build-to-rent and wildcat developments. Our water rules give families and businesses confidence to invest in our state, and we cannot continue to let individuals and corporations exploit these loopholes and rob us of our water future. We all recognize that our state is growing and we must continue to adapt while maintaining our long-held status as a national leader in water management. Our water standards are the key to our strong economy. I refuse to sacrifice them for unchecked growth. But I will continue in Arizona’s bipartisan tradition of growing our economy while protecting our state’s most precious resource.”

She concluded: “In that vein, I have directed the Arizona Department of Water Resources to finalize a new pathway for water providers and communities who have historically relied on groundwater resources. This new Alternative Designation of Water Resources program will provide an opportunity for these entities to achieve a one hundred-year assured water supply by contributing new water sources and reducing groundwater pumping – which will help ensure our future growth is both smart and sustainable. Let us remember that water and drought do not care about party registration or job titles or whether you live in an urban or rural community. We can only protect our water supply by working together. I stand ready to work with you to pass legislation that makes the changes we need today – all to safeguard Arizona’s water for tomorrow. And to those who have spent years refusing to act: if you don’t, I will.” <https://azgovernor.gov/office-arizona-governor/news/2024/01/transcript-governor-hobbs-2024-state-state-address>

## **Colorado**

On January 11, Governor Jared Polis (D-CO) outlined state victories and next steps for improving housing and transit, public safety, education, workforce participation, healthcare, environment, economy, and fiscal policy. He said: “We have also invested nearly \$300 Million into our precious water resources and implementation of the visionary Colorado Water Plan, and remain committed to aggressively defending Colorado’s interests and rights in the Colorado River negotiations. All of this work - from protecting our environment and wildlife, to housing and transit, education and workforce, to public safety - means a stronger and better Colorado where everyone can get ahead.” <https://www.colorado.gov/governor/news/11326-governor-polis-delivers-2024-state-state-address-focused-reducing-housing-costs-transit>

## **Idaho**

On January 8, Governor Brad Little (R-ID) focused his remarks on education, employment, transportation, and water. He said: “Water is the foundation of public health, economic prosperity, outdoor recreation, a strong agricultural sector, and Idahoans’ overall quality of life. Idaho must maintain our water sovereignty and not turn out like other western states in the Colorado River Basin, such as California, where the federal government stepped in to supersede the state’s control of its water. Since I took office, I have recommended and the Legislature has approved more than \$1 billion in additional funding for water-related infrastructure projects. We’ve dedicated roughly half of that to improving drinking water and wastewater treatment systems at the local level so Idahoans have safe water to drink and use. We put the other half of the \$1 billion to modernize water infrastructure statewide – much of which is a century old and in dire need of replacement or repair. We’ve made a lot of progress but we still have work to do, and I appreciate all the partners who continually demonstrate that IDAHO, not the feds, can best determine the fate of our water.”

He continued: “Speaking of infrastructure, we put \$1 billion to improve water quality and quantity in recent years, and our IDAHO WORKS plan also calls for the continued expansion of water infrastructure so we can ensure a stable water supply during both the good water years and the bad ones. This is especially important now. We have been blessed with ‘good’ water years of late but we may be headed into prolonged drought again, and prudence dictates we prepare.” <https://gov.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2024-sots.pdf>

## **Kansas**

On January 10, Governor Laura Kelly (D-KS) delivered a State of the State address which focused on issues impacting rural communities including medicaid expansion, public school funding, childcare development, cost of living , and water security. She said: “On so many of the issues I’ve outlined tonight, we need to act now to improve the lives of rural Kansans. But the final challenge I want to address tonight is longer-term, and it’s one that threatens the viability of our agriculture industry and our entire economy. And that’s our water crisis. Right now, we’re seeing this crisis in small towns across the state. In Southeast Kansas, Caney recently had to close schools on Fridays and shut down public restrooms because of ancient, leaking pipes. Meanwhile, parts of western Kansas have already seen wells dry up, and estimates show that others have less than 25 years to go. Think about that. Our next generation could be left with no usable water. For too long, our state’s leaders have not been good stewards of both our budget AND of our natural resources. That must end now. The challenge of preserving our water quality and quantity illustrates what I said earlier – that an existential issue for rural Kansas is an existential issue for our entire state.”

She continued: “My goal for the rest of my term is to put Kansas on the path to resolving this crisis. Thankfully, by working together, we’ve already made progress: Last year, the legislature passed a bipartisan bill that created a framework to ensure every community in Kansas is planning for the future... In addition to fully funding the State Water Plan for the second year in a row, we invested an historic \$35 million each of the next five years to deal with water issues... And, we’re paying off water infrastructure debt early, giving us additional dollars to resolve the crisis. It’s crucial that we build on that progress and empower even more stakeholders to take action. The good news is that we are in a better position than ever before to do that. My budget proposal tomorrow will fully fund the State Water Plan for the third year in a row... It will also include more funding for rural towns to update their water systems... It will provide resources for the new Kansas Water Institute at K-State, to leverage expertise and develop innovative solutions to water challenges. And, it will provide additional resources to help farmers and ranchers implement water-saving practices.

She said: “Those practices are gaining momentum throughout the state. More and more, Kansans are recognizing that we don’t have to choose between conserving water and growing the economy. That one is essential to the other. That includes Kansans like Mitch Baalman, a fourth-generation farmer from Hoxie. His father started Groundwater Management District 4 in the 1970’s, recognizing even back then the need to safeguard our water. From father to son, they’ve worked with other farmers in the area to, as Mitch puts it, “change the mentality and the culture” around water conservation. He got together with some of his friends from church and from the neighborhood... to start a Local Enhanced Management Area – or, as we know it, a LEMA – to encourage other producers to do more with less water. It wasn’t easy. Over five years, they held numerous public hearings, worked with customers, and partnered with the legislature to change statutes. But they’ve shown that, despite what many people believe, water is not an intractable issue. Sustainability is possible. Their LEMA has shown a nearly 30% reduction in water use, all while producers saved money and met their production goals. They are a model for other communities across the state, showing that coordinated, collective action on water conservation is good for our pocketbooks, and for our long-term economy. Mitch and his wife Lola are here tonight... Mitch, Lola, and others like them are making it possible to preserve the Kansas we all know and love. We owe it to ourselves, our children, and every future generation in Kansas to follow their lead and act now – before it’s too late.” <https://governor.kansas.gov/governor-kelly-delivers-her-2024-state-of-the-state-address/>

## **Nebraska**

On January 18, Governor Jim Pillen (R-NE) addressed tax reduction, workforce participation, housing affordability, education and childcare, and water resources. On Nebraska’s position in the developing bioeconomy he said: “Blessed with constantly renewed water resources that are not only a natural buffer against drought but also enable us to grow crops more sustainably than anywhere else, we already produce the building blocks of the new bioeconomy. This will provide more value for our agricultural products, more research and innovation, and more wealth right here.”

He continued: “We are the envy of the Nation when it comes to our people, our safety, our energy independence, and our food security. Center to it all is our pot of gold, the Ogallala Aquifer. One of the few truly sustainable aquifers in the western hemisphere. Our water is the key to value-added agriculture, the ability to raise more crops per acre while using less energy. Looking ahead, even beyond this session, it is critical that we strengthen our water laws to guarantee this priceless resource is not diverted to solve water management failures in other parts of the country. We must invest to incentivize ag producers to use less water to raise more. Better measurement tools, more use of technology, and more innovation will enable us to use less water while irrigating more crops right here in Nebraska.”

He said: “With our water being the envy of the world, we cannot allow adversarial foreign interests the ability to take it. That is why I am partnering with Senator DeKay to modernize Nebraska’s laws on land ownership to prohibit purchases by adversaries. This bill would tighten up those restrictions and provide a clear directive for enforcement.” <https://governor.nebraska.gov/press/governor-pillen-2024-state-state-address>

## **New Mexico**

On January 16, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham (D-NM) delivered her sixth State of the State address. She outlined legislative priorities including economic development and infrastructure, housing and homelessness, health care, education, and public safety. Regarding water resources she said: “Around the globe, access to water is the great challenge of the century. Let’s turn it into an opportunity. Imagine the potential of turning the ocean of brackish water beneath our feet into water we can put to use. To meet the demands of communities now and in the future, to sustain our economic growth, and to meet this moment with a first-of-its-kind solution, the Strategic Water Supply will build a secure, resilient water future for our state. I am asking the Legislature for \$500 million in Severance Tax Bonds to make this Strategic Water Supply a reality – spurring the private sector to turn an untapped resource into water that we can use without asking taxpayers to front the cost.”

She continued: “I’m announcing a commitment to pursue an advanced manufacturing tax credit, a companion to the groundbreaking Inflation Reduction Act, to make New Mexico even more competitive in reshoring global companies that will solidify a clean technology supply chain right here at home—delivering on the promise of a clean energy future requires modern, efficient infrastructure, from a resilient power grid to safe roads to reliable drinking water. Between federal and state funding, we’re putting more than \$7 billion dollars in infrastructure funds to work right now in every county in the state.”

Lujan Grisham provided an update on key projects, including the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project. She said: “We sped up and delivered on the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project – a 1-billion-dollar initiative more than a decade in the making. As a result, this project is already bringing drinking water to 6,000 New Mexicans – the majority of whom are living on the Navajo Nation. In the next 15 years, it will serve a quarter of a million more people... Projects like these have impacts that go far beyond their walls. They create thousands of jobs, both now and into the future. They bring new activity and new opportunities to communities statewide. They make our neighborhoods stronger, safer and more resilient.” <https://www.governor.state.nm.us/2024/01/16/new-mexico-is-made-to-lead-governor-delivers-second-state-of-the-state-address-announces-legislative-agenda/>

## North Dakota

On January 23, Governor Doug Burgum (R-ND) delivered a State of State address, highlighting North Dakota's strong agriculture and energy sectors, and its potential for economic growth. He highlighted his administration's work to resist federal overreach and maintain State sovereignty. He touted the State's success in attracting capital and investment to the State, including efforts in developing water infrastructure. He said: "On the water infrastructure side... we've invested 2.2B since 2017 for critical water supply, flood protection, and general water management. [This] wouldn't have been possible without the transition of the Department of Water Resources under the leadership of great director Andrea Travinicek. This biennium, the State Water Commission is poised to allocate \$600M more towards critical and high return water projects, further easing the burden on locals and making them more resilient."

Burgum highlighted the importance of completing the Northwest Area Water Supply (NAWS) and Red River projects. He said: "We have got to complete NAWS and Red River. We have got to get water flowing out of the Missouri into the eastern part of our state. That was the vision of the Garrison Diversion Project... We're at the cusp of finally making that happen. But we need to finish those projects, secure those water rights, and get those going before some other states decide that they want to come in and put a giant pipe into the Missouri river and start shipping that water west. We've got to take care of business here in North Dakota." <https://www.governor.nd.gov/news/2024-state-state-address-burgum-calls-action-address-housing-needs-announces-new-office>

## South Dakota

On January 9, Governor Kristi Noem (R-SD) gave her State of the State address and discussed the State's progress on gun policy, outdoor recreation, agriculture, prisoner rehabilitation, tribal representation, education, healthcare, and promoting workforce participation. She touted the success of the State's ad campaign to promote workforce participation for essential positions. She highlighted measures the State is taking to protect agricultural land from foreign interests. She said: "We're top-10 in the country for production of about 25 different agricultural commodities. Our farmers and ranchers provide about 30% of our state's economic output. South Dakota farmers are free to farm; South Dakota ranchers are free to ranch.... Last year, I brought forward legislation that would have stopped foreign adversaries from purchasing ag land in South Dakota.... In just the past decade, China's ownership of American ag land has increased by 5,300%. This is far too important to our national security to let another year go by and let our enemies gain a larger foothold in our economy and food supply chain. South Dakota respects the Freedom to farm and ranch. That Freedom should not extend to our enemies." [https://news.sd.gov/news?id=news\\_kb\\_article\\_view&sys\\_id=93b5584b1b2fb51031b1ebdbac4bcb8c](https://news.sd.gov/news?id=news_kb_article_view&sys_id=93b5584b1b2fb51031b1ebdbac4bcb8c)

## Utah

On January 18, Governor Spencer Cox (R-UT) delivered his 2024 State of the State address. He referred to Utah's water resource management as an example of its rejection of a "scarcity mindset". He said: "We were also faced with drought and water insecurity, and rejected the scarcity mindset that tells us we have to choose between prosperity or water security. Over the past two years we have provided more than \$1 billion dollars in water conservation and infrastructure funding. But even more importantly, the people of Utah have responded by using less water. While it's easy to convince people to conserve during the driest year, Utahns shocked the experts last year by using even less water in one of the wettest water years in our state's history. In fact, in the driest part of our state, despite a historic water year and a 5% increase in service connections, Washington County decreased its total water use by 1.2 billion gallons! This is proof of a paradigm shift. Utahns are doing the right thing, without the heavy hand of state government. The best news of all is that our reservoirs currently sit at 82% full — 24% above average. This provides us with a springboard for the ongoing implementation of conservation projects. And, it means that, as we have promised, we will save the Great Salt Lake." <https://governor.utah.gov/2024/01/18/gov-cox-delivers-his-2024-state-of-the-state-address/>

## Washington

On January 9, Governor Jay Inslee (D-OR) gave his eleventh State of the State address, focusing his remarks on minimum wage, climate change, energy affordability, education, healthcare, and gun policy. He emphasized the need to reduce emissions in the face of climate change. He said: "Climate change is our present, but climate collapse does not have to be inevitable. This Legislature put us on a clear – and necessary – path to slash greenhouse gasses 95% by 2050. We will stay the course. Any delay would be a betrayal of our children's future. We are on the razor's edge between promise and peril. We know this when historic floods gut homes that stood for generations, or when wildfires force the evacuation of entire towns like Medical Lake last year."

He went on to highlight legislative action the State has taken to reduce emissions and generate more affordable energy for Washington: "The Climate Commitment Act is letting us invest in work that reduces pollution and creates good-paying jobs. It's funding electric school buses, 8 million free transit rides for youth and counting, filtration systems in schools so students can breathe when there's wildfire smoke outside, and public chargers for electric vehicles... I'm proposing a \$200

utility bill credit for one out of every three households in Washington – that’s nearly 2 million low- and moderate-income Washingtonians. We will help thousands more families install energy-efficient heat pumps that cut emissions and energy bills. This law also makes it easier to invest in our infrastructure, including hybrid-electric ferries, and safer bike and pedestrian routes.” <https://governor.wa.gov/news/speeches/2024-state-state-address-run-through-tape>